TEMPORARY EXHIBITION

CARLOS MOTTA

Shapes of Freedom

Alita from the series "Beloved Martina", 2016. Sand stone 3D print, 11 x 25 x 8 cm

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Gallery A and the Foundry

In 1957, the psychologist and sexologist John Money defined the term "gender" as different from the traditional notion of "sex," to refer to a person's inclusion in a culturally recognized cluster of masculine or feminine behavior displaying similar physical and idiosyncratic expression. This opened up the possibility of discussing the traditional definitions of sexual identity. A decade earlier, with the end of the Second World War, Bernard Baruch, financier and advisor to American presidents, had coined the term "Cold War" to refer to the political, economic, social, military, informative, scientific, and other clashes between the Western and the Eastern Blocs that would have a deep impact on the countries of Latin America and – paradoxically – also on the regulation of sex and gender identities.

Carlos Motta (Bogotá, 1978) has worked around the implications of these historical events since the late nineties. Early in his career he produced the photographie project *Untitled Self-Portraits* (1998), a series of images in which the artist experiments with the representation of sexual otherness, the elasticity of the notion of identity, and the politics of difference. In this work, his body and sexuality appear ambiguous and at the edge of traditionally identifiable categories.

In the early 2000s, Motta turned to the Latin American political context and in particular to the complex lattice of entangled power and interests in his native Colombia. *Pesca milagrosa* (2002-2004), for example, is an installation of 495 digitally manipulated photographs of victims of a practice the guerrilla maintained in those years which consisted in the blocking the road with checkpoints and kidnapping people that were profiled according to their financial capacity. But the interest goes further: a work as apparently simple as *When, If Ever, Does One Draw a Line Under the Horrors of History in the Interest of Truth and Reconciliation?* (2009) betrays a preoccupation with war, conflict and its possible solutions that supersedes the circumstances of the South American country.

Halfway through the decade, Motta developed a series of fundamental projects based on his interest in political processes. *The Good Life* (2005-2008) is a multi-channel video installation in which he presents fragments of over 360 interviews conducted in twelve Latin American cities where passersby address the processes of democratization in their respective countries. The simple, amphitheater-style structures in which the material is presented advance his interest in the structural and spatial solution that supports the thematic material and that would reappear in later projects. Linked to this work, *Ideological Graffiti* (2005-2011) is a series of photographs that exteriorize different political claims made on the streets of the continent. Both examine the democratic processes taking place in Latin American countries in relation to the interventionist policies the United States imposed on the region.

In parallel to and as a consequence of these projects, Motta investigated the history of US-American intervention in Latin America since the beginnings of the Cold War and into the nineties, as well as the history of the guerilla movements during the same period and across the same geography. This investigation is formalized in two timelines, *Brief History of US Interventions in Latin America Since 1946* and *Brief History of Leftist Guerrillas in Latin America*, which – paired with images of soldiers at war cut out of adhesive vinyl installed on the wall – form the project *Brief History* (2005-2009), a visualization of the repercussions and in some cases direct effects of that historical period in Latin American history.

Later works such as *Six Acts. An Experiment in Narrative Justice* (2001) take up the topic of democracy again. In the context of the 2010 presidential elections in Colombia, Motta asked six actors of various ethnicities and races to recite pacifist discourses in publics squares of Bogotá originally spoken by Colombian leftist leaders who were later assassinated for their political convictions.

Over the last decade and in parallel to his political investigation, Motta resumed the concern for and questioning of hegemonic narratives of sex and gender that he had explored in his early years through installations that use political or activist discourse, first, and film and sculpture with formally and lyrically autonomous languages, later. This is visible in the *Nefandus Trilogy*, a series

composed of three films that address Prehispanic sexuality and the nefarious stigma the Spanish conquistadors brought to bear on it through Christian morality and Castilian law. It is also visible in *Inverted World* (2016), a video in which the artist performs an inversion inside a chapel, an action that references Caravaggio's *Crucifixion of Saint Peter. Inverted World* is part of a project that investigates the tense historical relationship between the Catholic church and dissident sexualities through a series of three videos that propose alternative visions of the moral values endorsed by the doctrines of Christianity regarding sexuality.

Towards a Homoerotic Historiography (2014) is an installation that recreates a classical museum gallery in which small gold-covered silver reproductions of Pre-Columbian sculptures of homoerotic scenes are displayed in delicate backlit boxes. The work regards the objects as jewels, that is, with heightened material and symbolic value, and reflects on the ongoing censorship they have been subjected to by the social sciences and encourages a removal of the Christian values that have been imposed on them, thus reconsidering the role the body, desire, and pleasure may have played in ancient cultures.

Among Motta's recent works that drawn from gender activism we also find *We Who Feel Differently* (2011), an online database documentary that addresses some of the critical issues of queer cultures in different parts of the world. The project, which is frequently presented as an installation, is built from interviews with fifty academics, activists, artists, radicals, researchers, and other social actors and queer people from Colombia, Norway, South Korea, and the United States. Included in this exhibition is the project's ideological manifesto; the interviews can be accessed on www.wewhofeeldifferently.info

More recently, *Gender Talents* (2015), which at MAMM is presented as a two-channel video installation, is an archive of documentary video portraits and a platform for events that engages discourses and movements for gender self-determination within trans* and intersex communities. Based on interviews carried out in Colombia, Guatemala, India and the United States, the project seeks to expose the ways in which international activists challenge the so-called bio-cultural "foundations" of society and question gender norms from the perspective of sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, and disability.

Thus, Motta's work develops along two clear lines. One examines the unjust political and social events that have taken place in Colombia and Latin America as part of a wider investigation into democracy and the effects of the Cold War on the region. The other gives a voice to various representatives of social groups erroneously called minorities where he discusses the dominant and problematic historical narrative around sexual and gender identities. In both areas, the artist retrieves incidents, signs, and stories that are in dialogue with present social conditions. The result are works of cultural criticism in which his commitment to activism is apparent.

Carlos Motta. Shapes of Freedom takes its name from the eponymous work presented in the Foundry that consists of a giant pink triangle, a symbol of gay liberation after it was abhorrently used in the German concentration camps, transforming the exhibition space into one of sexual and political vindication. Like other of Motta's projects, this installation is accompanied by a timeline that describes some of the most important moments in the struggle for gay rights in Colombia and the West.

The exhibition presents both areas in a continuous dialogue with each other and as part of one single body of work. It gives an account of the artist's rigorous study of queer culture, politics, and activism, characterized by its insistence on showing that sex and gender politics –as well as political activity in general–, represent an opportunity to take up positions against injustice, exclusion, and stigma.

United Latin America from *When, if ever, does one draw a line under the horrors of history in the interest of truth and reconciliation? A timeline of the recent political history of ten countries in conflict*, 2009. Screen print, 20 x 16"
Courtesy of the artist and Mor Charpentier Galerie, Paris

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